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## CURRENT OPINION

### The Faith of Tolstoy

“Tolstoy’s Religion” is the subject treated by E. A. Thurber in the January number of the *Open Court*. It seems that Tolstoy was not always the best judge of himself. Men who, like him, have a stormy imagination and a searching mind are apt to overstate and, in a kind of intellectual fury, to fail to account for such influences that in spite of them work in their lives. Tolstoy, in his very old age, seemed inclined to declare that his religion owed much to non-Christian teaching, like Krishna, Buddha, Socrates, Epictetus. But, after all, he drew very little inspiration from these sages of the world: the source of his religious experience was the Bible, the influence which brought about what may be called his final conversion is the character of Jesus. Mr. Thurber calls Tolstoy a modern St. Augustine. Like the great Bishop of Hippo, he felt intensely the power of passions, like him he wrote a book dealing with his experiences, and he called it *My Confession*. Although Tolstoy was excommunicated by the Orthodox church, he was far from being the kind of man who will water down his belief and make all religion consist in “good works.” Tolstoy did not belong to the moralists: for him good works are simply the natural offshoot of faith.

### The Mission of Judaism in America

Rabbi J. S. Kornfeld, in the *Forum*, December, 1913, in an answer to Israel Zangwill’s statement: “Thousands of the rising generation have never seen phylacteries, or carried a palm branch, or sat in a tabernacle. . . . The bulk of American Jewry know more of Christian Science than of the Talmud or even the Mosaic Code,” contends that true Judaism does not consist in the observance of outward forms. Judaism in essence, according to

Rabbi Kornfeld, is a civilizing force. Its supreme mission in the world is to be the savior of society. It considers justice as the highest attribute of God and wishes this attribute to dominate all society. To accomplish this social mission Judaism adjusts itself to the changing conditions of life: it casts off the old forms and assumes the new.

The great problems of our age relate to the questions of international peace, of the social evil, and of capital and labor. Rabbi Kornfeld is confident that Judaism, adhering as it does to the social messages of the great Old Testament prophets, is a solvent, if not the solvent, of these perplexing problems. In view of this society-saving quality of Judaism, what the Jews in America need most of all to do is to practically work out the social principles of their religion. In so doing Judaism will in reality become the savior of society. And thus will Rabbi Kornfeld’s vision for Judaism be realized.

### Salvation and Mysticism

Miss Evelyn Underhill studies “Mysticism and the Doctrine of the Atonement” in the January number of the *Interpreter*. There seems to be incompatibility between the conception of atonement and the process of mysticism: on the one hand, if we conceive of man saved because the divine life humiliated itself and sacrificed itself for humanity can we, on the other hand, think that man is being saved by a process of personal and individual growth through a progressive union with God? These two ideas are two sides of a greater whole. The one-sided idea of the death of Christ on Calvary being the all-important factor in our salvation, redeeming us once for all, has no use for mysticism, but the wonderful doctrine of the Incarnation is not in opposition to mysticism;

far from it. It can be understood in all its fulness and beauty by mystics only. Paul, the greatest of all Christian mystics, the founder of Christian theology, is supremely the theologian of the Atonement. He feels himself, he knows himself, to be part of "the body of Christ," and then he tries to reason and understand where he stands. He has a vision of something supreme, an enormous uplift achieved for and in the human race: it is not a dream because he knows it to be so in him, the mystic Paul. Even his eschatology is connected with this: Christ who has triumphed in his soul will reign over the whole realm of creation, this being the supreme victory of the incarnate life. Faith is a mystical vision, love is a mystical act. This is why there is no opposition between the mystic ideals and the atoning idea. Without the principle of solidarity which the Atonement expresses, the mystics would be isolated and their experiences meaningless except for themselves. Without the great mystical self-donation in love the Atonement would be only history, a fact of the past having no influence in the development of the world. Without the mystical vision of faith the Atonement would remain a dry doctrine and could never become a part of our religious consciousness.

#### **Is the Church of England the Church of the English People?**

In the *Hibbert Journal* for January, 1914, Rev. A. W. F. Blunt, who holds a living in England, writes on "The Failure of the Church of England." We often hear from other quarters of the increase of the church in England, of her revived zeal, and of her more efficient grasp of modern questions. It seems, however, that the inadequate number of clergy and the decrease of church attendance, very marked in all English religious bodies, points to a weakening of the influence of the church as well as of Nonconformity.

Mr. Blunt does not think that the average Englishman is upset by theological or academical questions. Intellectual difficulties may account for 5 per cent at most of the cases of indifference to the church. Any parish priest will tell you that the enemies of the religious observance are late hours, the pipe, the motor car, the bicycle, and the golf club. There is very little opposition to the church; her dogmas and sacraments are not attacked; but this is because the church is not understood, and people think that she is too immaterial and impractical. Men will willingly acknowledge that the church is an ethical agency and wields a powerful influence for good, but the moral fiber has slackened among all classes so that the discipline of the church has fallen into disuse, not because it is ecclesiastical, but merely because it is discipline. On the other hand the clergy have compromised too much with the present attitude of the world toward morality. We may have Christianized the world a little, says Mr. Blunt, but we have permitted the world to secularize the church a great deal more.

It would be good policy to draw a clearer line of demarkation between the church and the world and to proclaim the value of dogma as a necessary expression of the corporate mind of the church. The notion of being a church which claims every baptized Englishman and gives him a right to belong to the church and no duty to obey her has not worked well and ought to give place to a more "catholic" conception. Let the laity be taught what the church is, and in order to attain this end let the clergy be well fitted intellectually. They may have very few occasions of using scientific arguments with gainsayers, but their deeper—and to a great extent hidden—knowledge of the facts of science and philosophy which underlie the world will tell upon their teaching and make it more effective.